THE CASE
OF
BOHEMIA

BY
LEWIS B. NAMIER

Published by
THE CZECH NATIONAL ALLIANCE IN GREAT BRITAIN.
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This pamphlet originally appeared as an article in "The New Statesman" on December 9th, 1916. This acknowledgement and my best thanks are due to its Editor and Proprietors for their kind permission to reprint the articles in the present form.

L.B.N.

The Case of Bohemia.

With the exception of Bohemia,* the land of the Czechs, each "subject race" of Germany and Austria-Hungary forms the "unredeemed" inheritance of a neighbouring State, and its liberation is therefore the particular war-aim of that State. But there is no Czech land outside Austria-Hungary, and the 10,000,000 Czechs and Slovaks inhabiting Bohemia, Moravia, Austrian Silesia and Slovakia have nowhere a friend on their borders; they find themselves completely encircled by their immemorial enemies, the Germans and Magyars. Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria and the Austrian Duchies surround them on the north, west and south, Magyar land on the south-east. Their only other neighbours, the Austrian Poles, are bound by ties of traditional friendship to the Magyars, and for the last forty years have maintained a tacit understanding with the Austrian Germans; they have long thrown behind them the Pan-Slav ideas which they embraced for a while in 1848, and have never in recent times shown any feeling for their humbler and more democratic Slav brethren. Unaided, entirely by its own strength, the Czech nation has survived

* The name of "Bohemia" is here used in its wider meaning to denote all territories inhabited by the Czechs and Slovaks, i.e., all land in which a majority professes allegiance to the Bohemian Crown, the Crown which never touched the brows of Francis Joseph. He promised to be crowned in 1871, but never redeemed his promise.

the trials of centuries; and yet by the logic of history the common war-aim of all those who fight on the side of the Entente is now closely bound up with the cause of this most isolated of nations. The international position of Bohemia after the war will be the truest test of victory.

The war broke out over an attempt on the part of the Central States to lay down the law to Europe on a question in which the interests of other nations were known to be involved. For the Germans and Magyars, what was behind it was a problem of power, not of territory. Very soon, however, power came to be conceived in terms of territory. German and Magyar dominion was to be secured by cessions of land such as would for the future incapacitate their opponents. On the other hand, the nations represented by the Entente now naturally bethought themselves of their unredeemed lands remaining under German or Magyar rule; claims of nationality, which for fear of war had been left dormant for generations or even centuries, sprang to life once war had broken out. The original Germanic programme in the war was expansion all round; that of the Allied States was the attainment of national unity.

The events of the next fifteen months, their failures and successes, transformed the programme of the Central Powers; a vague principle changed into a clear and definite scheme. For years German policy had suffered from a

divergence of aims and a dispersion of forces. The war and its alliances have produced a concentration of purpose which, unless met with equal clearness, is certain to gain for Germany, if not victory, at least the foundations of future success. "Mittel-Europa" has become the war-aim of the German, and, in a slightly different form, of the Magyar nation also. Germans no longer seriously consider annexations in the West. The vision of a great empire in Central Africa has faded into the background, except in the minds of a small minority, and allusions to the lost colonies are rare and perfunctory. As regards Russian Poland, most Germans would probably be prepared to accept any solution which would leave and guarantee to Prussia the possession of her present Polish provinces. But the zeal for "Mittel-Europa" has only grown greater with the failing of other interests. The old continental dream of Napoleon—an overland route into Asia—has become the cardinal issue of the war. Unless the very foundations of Central European Imperialism are destroyed, this aim will survive the present war and we may see stretching before us the vista of continuous unrest in the future.

"Mittel-Europa" implies the absolute and undisputed predominance of the German element in Austria, and German suzerainty over a Magyarised Hungary, a Coburgised Bulgaria and an Enverised Turkey. The aggressive policies

of these four nations—Germans, Magyars, Bulgars and Turks—have come under a common expert direction, and, wherever they are left a chance, will work in accord. All of them are instruments to enable the German master-nation to reach a further goal: a secure "sphere of influence" in Asia and Egypt. If this programme had not been developed in the middle of a world-war it would inevitably have provoked one. Arising firm and clear over the storm of battle, the watchword "Mittel-Europa," which expresses the vision of ages and continents, has transmuted blustering passion into the fixed consciousness of an inexorable issue. This fight has now to be carried on beyond the limits known in any previous war; for it is truly a struggle for existence. The aims of "Mittel-Europa" are a menace to the future of all the Great Powers of the Entente. The Germanised Balkans threaten the British Empire in Asia, and Russia's position in Europe; Russia would be deprived of her only possible sea-route to the West should the Straits be bridged by the German land-route to the East. France would be excluded from the Eastern Mediterranean; Italy, having lost her influence both in the Ægean and the Adriatic, would cease to rank as a Great Power. As for the races of the unredeemed lands, their very existence is imperilled by the basic requirements of Central European Union; not even the very modest measure of national self-government,

such as was allowed to them in Austria before the war, will be tolerated anywhere in "Mittel-Europa," once they have been an issue in an armed conflict.

But whilst the German-Magyar scheme thus threatens the fringes of the British Empire, France, Italy, Russia and Roumania, it postulates the complete destruction of two nations—the Serbs and the Czechs. These must cease altogether to exist as nations if "Mittel-Europa" is to arise: for they intervene between the Germans and Magyars, and the Magyars and Bulgars. The Serbs stand in the way of the Central European steam-roller. The Czechs are a spoke in its wheels, and unless broken up they threaten to paralyse its movements. Bohemia occupies the centre of "Mittel-Europa"; it intervenes between its capitals. It extends within less than fifty miles of Vienna, Budapest, Leipzig and Breslau, within less than a hundred miles of Berlin and Munich. The Czech nation stands there as truly for the discomfiture of the German-Magyar allies, as it is not there for their service.

The national history of Bohemia is filled by one long struggle against the Universal German Monarchy under whatever garb it should appear. The Hussite Wars, in the first half of the fifteenth century, were as much national as they were religious; they were a revolt against German dominion in Bohemia and against the claims of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation,

the ancestor of Pan-German "Mittel-Europa." The supremacy of the Empire was put to the proof, but finally the small, isolated Czech nation had to pay the penalty of its daring. It was vanquished. Two centuries went by and once more it took up arms against Catholicism in Church and State. In 1618 the Czechs renounced their allegiance to the Hapsburg Emperor, the embodiment of the new World Empire, and declared their national independence. It was not after all by conquest that they had come under the House of Austria in 1526, but by an agreement, ever since disregarded by the Hapsburgs. The Czechs now summoned to their throne a prince who was a son-in-law to the King of England, hoping that England, the enemy of Hapsburg Spain and Papal Rome, would help those who raised the banner of revolt within the camp of her foes. But James I., with an insular aloofness, a pharisaic honesty and a political blindness not yet altogether extinct in these islands, was busy studying the constitution of Bohemia, and the rights and wrongs of the case, whilst the rebels were succumbing in the desperate, unequal battle on the White Mountain. Never has so great a disaster befallen any other civilised nation. Execution and banishment swept away its upper classes, its wealth and education. Nothing remained but a peasant people as indestructible as the soil, and as passive.

Again two centuries went by. Time, unmea-

sured by events, was flowing over a dead nation. In appearance the Germans had achieved their aim. The very name of the Czech nation seemed forgotten. When in the second half of the eighteenth century some Slav-speaking inhabitants of Bohemia petitioned the Austrian Emperor, they were described by the picturesque term of *Originalböhmen*. The Germans looked upon them as a kind of half-extinct aborigines. Then came the great Czech literary renaissance of the romantic age—the spiritual rebirth of Bohemia. By 1848 it had matured into political action, and its first expression was again a protest and a revolt against Germany's Mid-European Imperialism. The German revolutionary Parliament at Frankfort, the heir of the Holy Roman Empire, summoned representatives from the Bohemian lands. The Czechs refused the invitation, and in order to create a counterbalance to the German power convoked in Prague the first Pan-Slav Congress. The Czechs, Poles and Jugo-Slavs were to unite into a barrier on Germany's Eastern borders. In Austria, by their joint strength they were to break the force of the Pan-Germans and the Magyars, who then were also the chief enemies of the Hapsburgs. It was a fine dream, shattered almost as soon as it was conceived. It presupposed wisdom and courage in people who had neither—for it was not the Hapsburgs only who were deficient in that respect. The Jugo-Slavs alone shared the

views of the Czechs, but were as yet too weak to be of much assistance.

What followed for the Czechs, after this failure, was like a nightmare. In spite of the extraordinary development of wealth, and the growth of education which put them on a level with the most progressive nations of Europe, they were weighed down by the consciousness that Bohemia was being buried alive. Her enemies were growing in strength and closing in on her. By the Dualist Settlement of 1867 the separation between the Czechs and the Slovaks was made absolute and the Slovaks were handed over to the mercies of the Magyars. By the final failure of the federalist movement in Austria, the Czechs were forced to enter the Viennese Parliament, which for years they had refused to do. They entered it under protest, still asserting the inalienable rights of the Bohemian Crown, and sat in it a hopeless minority incapable of making their influence tell in any of the great problems of domestic or foreign policy. With the Austro-German Alliance of 1879—an alliance formed by Germans and Magyars—the flood of "Mittel-Europa" completely encircled Bohemia. With the desperation of drowning men the Czechs continued to work for a rapprochement of the Hapsburg Monarchy with Russia and France, and against the German Alliance. It was all in vain. At last the thunder of an avalanche broke that oppressive silence which self-complacent coward-

ice used to call the peace of Europe. The creeping glaciers of Mid-Europe were reaching Serbia in their advance, and this at least is for a nation the advantage of having a State of its own, be it within the narrowest boundaries, that the agonies of its death-struggles break the urbane silence of diplomats and the ignorant indifference of more fortunate nations.

Now at last the problem of "Mittel-Europa" and of its aggrandisement has become for all Europe the cardinal political issue. At such a moment can Bohemia be forgotten, or her case passed over in silence? When once a free Bohemian land emerges in the heart of Central Europe we shall know that the flood of German-Magyar aggression is receding, never to rise again. For the Powers which establish Bohemian independence will by that very act be united in the future against a possible recrudescence of German Imperialism. There is not a single State among the Allies whose interests clash with those of the Czech nation. To all of them the freedom of Bohemia will be a safeguard against a new German advance and a barometer of German pressure. The desire to remove the Czech wedge which divides "Mittel-Europa" will be foremost in any revival of the Pan-German dream. But once the independence of Bohemia is established, neither Russia, Great Britain nor France can ever concede the smallest abridgment thereof. For in it each of these nations will find a prin-

ciple which it holds sacred: Slav brotherhood, national self-government and liberty. Cynics may sneer and doubt the strength of principles; yet Serbia and Belgium, and the principles embodied in their independence, have given rise to action such as mere self-interest could never have produced; and in Russia itself German influences were unable to defy the Slav feelings of the nation. Bohemia recreated should never again be overwhelmed, and by her very existence will destroy the nightmare of a German-Magyar hegemony of Europe.

Printed in Great Britain by J. J. Keliher & Co., Ltd., Marshalsea Road, London, S.E.